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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this investigation were (1) to replicate a previous study by Michael Burgoon which showed Machiavellianism to be a predictor of success in speech communication courses whose small group and dyadic activities comprise most of the performance experience and (2) to determine if personality variables other than Machiavellianism would be useful to predict success in an interpersonal communication course. Subjects, 196 students enrolled in a basic speech communication course, completed the Mach scale and the 140-item Interpersonal Behavior Inventory Form which yields measures of fifteen personality variables. The fifteen scores, Mach scores, final exam score, and final course grade were analyzed by correlation and multiple regression analysis. Results showed that a student demonstrating nurturance (defined as a sympathetic listener, counselor, and helper in need) may also be a successful student in interpersonal communication courses. (JM)

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MACHIAVELLIANISM IN THE BASIC COURSE--AGAIN

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ABSTRACT

Following up on Burgoon's article showing Machiavellianism to be a predictor of success in speech communication courses in which small group and dyadic activities compromise most of the performance experience, this investigation replicates that finding and intrcduces "nurturance" as a possible second predictor in interpersonal communication courses.

Burgoon's article some three years ago now introduced Machiavellianism or the willingness to manipulate others as a predictor of success in speech communication courses in which small group and dyadic communication activities comprise most of the performance experience.[1] Perhaps some may have felt uncomfortable by that conclusion and Burgoon's speculation that such courses, by rewarding Machiavellians, may serve to attract a new type of speech communication major. In a critique of Burgoon's conclusions, Rossiter, Macklin and Luecke argued that Machiavellian behaviors are inconsistent with the objectives of most interpersonal communication courses and that it is then inconsistent that Machiavellian behaviors would be rewarded by interpersonal communication instructors.[2] Indeed, a subsequent replication of the Burgoon study by Libby and Van Rheenen indicates that students endorsing Machiavellian attitudes indeed tended to receive lower grades in an interpersonal communication course.[3]

Christie described this, Agger, and Pinner's original defining characteristics of effective control of others as they developed them in 1954-1955 at the

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[1]Michael Burgoon, "The Relationship Between Willingness to Manipulate Others and Success in Two Different Types of Basic Speech Communication Courses," The Speech Teacher, 1971, 20, 178-183.

[2]Charles R. Rossiter, Jr., Thomas J. Macklin, and John R. Luecke, "A Critique of Burgoon's Study of Willingness to Manipulate Others and Success in Two Basic Speech Communication Courses," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association convention, December, 1972.

[3]Glenn M. Libby and Dwayne D. Van Rheenen, "British Order, Machiavellianism, Sex, and Final Grade in Two Types of Basic Speech Communication Courses," paper presented at the International Communication Association convention, April, 1974.

Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences.[4] The characteristics they devised of one effective in controlling others were: a relative lack of affect in interpersonal relationships viewing others as objects to be manipulated, a lack of concern with conventional morality having an utilitarian view of interactions with others, a lack of gross psychopathology meaning that contact with at least the more objective aspects of reality is within the normal range, and low ideological commitment such as evidenced by involvement in tactics for achieving possible ends rather than an inflexible striving for an ultimate idealistic goal. After having reviewed some thirty-eight different experimental studies conducted since the initial formulations, Geis and Christie concluded that "high Machs manipulate more, win more, are persuaded less, persuade others more, and otherwise differ significantly from low Machs . . . in situations in which subjects interact face to face with others, when the situation provides latitude for improvisation and the subject must initiate responses as he can or will, and in situations in which affective involvement with details irrelevant to winning distracts low Machs."[5]

Geis and Christie's description of the situational characteristics which facilitate the dispositional differences between high and low Machs also seems to describe the classroom environment in many basic speech communication courses in which interpersonal competency is stressed. In these courses, to paraphrase Geis and Christie, small group and dyadic communication is emphasized, communication is "unrehearsed" or improvised, and a high course grade may not

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[4]Richard Christie and Florence L. Geis, Studies in Machiavellianism (New York, 1970), pp. 3-4.

[5]Christie and Geis, p. 312.

be facilitated by affective peer relationships in the classroom. As interpersonal adaptability or flexibility may be stressed, affective peer relationships may be detrimental to the student's course grade. Perhaps Burgoon's finding is not that surprising, but the question remains whether this does describe the variety of basic courses in the discipline.

The purpose of the investigation reported here was to replicate the Burgoon study in a basic speech communication course which is totally designed as an interpersonal communication course and to determine if personality variables other than Machiavellianism would be useful to predict success in an interpersonal communication course.[6]

METHOD

Subjects were 196 students enrolled in a basic speech communication course at State University College at Brockport in the Spring semester, 1973. The course was taught by five graduate assistant instructors (four men, one woman) under the direction of a full-time staff member. While this course has been described elsewhere in detail,[7] its performance aspect involved only small group experiences.

All 196 students completed the Mach scale[8] and the 140-item Interpersonal

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[6]Judd and Smith reported an inability to predict success in one basic course from eighteen personality variables. See Larry R. Judd and Carolyn Smith, "Predicting Success in the Basic College Speech Course," The Speech Teacher, 1969, 18, 13-17.

[7]Fred E. Jandt, "Why Interpersonal Communication?--Round II," Today's Speech, 1974, 22(1), 37-39.

[8]Richard Christie, "Machiavellianism," in John P. Robinson and Phillip R. Shaver, Measures of Social Psychological Attitudes (Ann Arbor, 1969).

Behavior Inventory Form 4[9] early in the course. The IBI developed by Maurice Lorr and Douglas M. McNair yields measures of fifteen personality variables: dominance, competitiveness, hostility, mistrust, detachment, inhibition, submissiveness, succorance, abasiveness, deference, agreeableness, nurturance, affection, sociability, and exhibition.

These fifteen scores, the Mach scores, the final examination score based upon a fifty-item multiple choice examination, and the final course grade based on a 4.0 point scale were analyzed by correlation and multiple regression analysis.

RESULTS

The Mach scale yielded a mean of 101.86 with a standard deviation of 11.21. The correlation between Mach scores and final examination score was .33. Other correlations with Mach scores were with mistrust (.39), aggressiveness (.32), and detachment (.31).

The correlation between Mach scores and final course grades was .15. Other correlations with final course grades were with final examination grades (.61), nurturance (.27), affection (.21), agreeableness (.18), and sociability (.15). Yet, a factor analysis of all eighteen variables produced a five factor matrix accounting for 72% of variance yielded the four clear factors of the IBI scores and Mach scores, final examination scores, and final course grade as one factor, although Mach scores could as easily be placed in mistrust-detachment-inhibition factor.

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[9]Copyright 1967 by Maurice Lorr, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

In the multiple regression analyses with Mach scores as the dependent variable, the beta or normalized regression coefficient with mistrust was .27 and with the final examination was .56. In the multiple regression analyses with the final course grade as the dependent variable and not considering the final examination scores as that relationship appears overwhelmingly strong, analyses of variance for the regression was not significant (F 1), however the beta coefficient with nurturance was .21.

Adding into the analysis an overall instructor and an overall course evaluation items from a final course evaluation form administered with the final examination yielded the following positive but low correlations: between overall instructor evaluation and final course grade (.29), agreeableness (.26), affection (.23), and Mach (.23); and between overall course evaluation and final course grade (.20), agreeableness (.17), and Mach (.17). Correlation between overall instructor and overall course evaluations was .51. Adding into the analysis Vocational Preference Inventory scores (sexual orientation by job preference) and Janis-Field Persuasibility scores collected for another study yielded the following correlations: between Vocational Preference Inventory scores and competition (.38), exhibition (.27), dominance (.26), and aggression (.20); and between total persuasibility scores and overall course evaluation (.33), affection (.33), sociability (.32), and exhibition (.31).

DISCUSSION

Personality variables have never been clear-cut variables, making data interpretation difficult. Additionally, data such as reported here should not be generalized to other courses.

But, given these cautions, one may speculate that at least in this one particular interpersonal communication course one particular semester that the

relationship established by Burgoon may be expanded upon. Broadly speaking, high Machs who also scored high on mistrust (and even more generally the mistrust-detachment-inhibition IBI factor) tended to do well on the final examination and tended to receive a high course grade. They also tended to evaluate their instructors and the course favorably. It should be noted that in Burgoon's study, only 67 of his 217 subjects were graded with a final examination. Christie, though, has not been able to demonstrate any major correlation between Mach scores and measures of intelligence.[10] Weinstein has pointed out that as the Machiavellian accepts manipulativeness as an orientation toward interaction, suspects others are also manipulative, and can conceal his willingness to exploit, he is more interpersonally competent if success in controlling others is the object.[11] Perhaps tend that the high Mach tends to do well in interpersonal communication courses is not that unexpected.

However, there is also the possibility that those who scored high on nurturance (and more generally the deference-agreeableness-nurturance-affection-sociability factor) also tend to do well on the final examination, to receive a high course grade, and to evaluate their instructors and the course favorably. The question remains whether this investigation points to a possible second predictor of success in interpersonal communication courses or whether it identifies a mode of operation for the Machiavellians. Does the high Mach, realizing that a high course grade most likely will come from the humanistic

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[10]Christie and Geis, p. 37.

[11]Eugene A. Weinstein, "The Development of Interpersonal Competence," in David A. Goslin, Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research (Chicago, 1969), p. 770.

interpersonal communication instructor if he demonstrates to the instructor nurturance, etc., perform in that fashion in class? Perhaps, though, the student demonstrating nurturance, defined by Lorr and McNair's IBI test items as a sympathetic listener, counselor, and helper in need, may also be a successful student in interpersonal communication courses.